



Got Insomnia? How is your sleep hygiene?

Sleep hygiene refers to the everyday behaviors and habits that affect your sleep. Just getting enough sleep isn't enough, it must be restful and restorative sleep. In other words, sleep quality is just as important as quantity. Research shows that making certain adjustments to your routines and habits can greatly improve your sleep both in quality and quantity.

Time Patterns: The human body functions on an internal clock and responds to cycles called "circadian rhythms." You will sleep best if you generally get to bed at the same time every night and even more importantly get up at the same time every morning. This includes days off. Your body will learn to associate sleep/wake cycles with the time of day and respond to those associations. This also means don't take daytime naps and don't fall asleep on the sofa in the early evening! Your internal clock is set by your wake up time.

Light: Make sure the room you sleep in is not too bright. Cover windows and use a small night light if you prefer to have a little light. If you do use a night light make sure it is not directly in your visual field – it is best if it is behind a table or something that will block the light.

Sound: Make sure the room is quiet. Turn off the TV, radio, or any other source of noise. You can get a white noise machine that blocks out sounds by making a gentle, continuous background noise. Sometimes a fan set on low or a room humidifier will serve the same purpose since they generate white noise.

Temperature: Make sure the room is not too hot or too cold. What you wear to sleep and what kind of sheets and blankets you use is also important for this. If you get too hot or too cold during sleep this can cause you to awaken.

Behavior: Use your bed for sleeping only. If you use your bed only for sleeping and do not eat, work, or watch TV, etc. in bed, then your body knows when you get in bed it is time to go to sleep. If you can't sleep, get up and go somewhere else to read or listen to some soft music, then go back to bed and try to sleep again.

The following things all can interfere with sleep:

Food: Eating before bed or during the night triggers release of insulin and other hormones associated with digestion which can interfere with sleep and throw off circadian rhythms.

Smoking: Nicotine in cigarettes is a stimulant and interferes with sleep. Don't smoke before bed or during the night. Ideally, don't smoke at all.

Exercise: Exercising releases adrenaline and prepares your body for maximum alertness, not sleep. You should exercise regularly, but not within 2-3 hours before going to sleep.

Television: Do not watch television before bed – television is generally stimulating, not relaxing! It will keep you from falling asleep. Turn it off!

Caffeine: Caffeine is a stimulant and will keep you awake. If you are having any kind of sleep problems you should not take caffeine. Caffeine is a tasteless, odorless substance and so decaffeinated beverages should not taste any different. Taper yourself off of caffeine by mixing half regular and half decaffeinated, going down by a half cup every two days to avoid withdrawal symptoms of headache and sluggishness. Once you are totally off caffeine you will feel better, sleep better, and have more energy during the day.

Alcohol: Some people use alcohol to get to sleep. This is a big mistake. Although alcohol might help some people fall asleep, research shows that alcohol disrupts normal sleep and the sleep you get will be poor in quality. Do not drink alcohol if you have sleep problems. Even one or two glasses of wine with dinner can interfere with the quality of sleep. Save it for special occasions.

Over-the-counter medicines: Certain over-the-counter headache medicines contain caffeine – read the label and avoid them. Certain over-the-counter cold medicines and decongestants (such as pseudoephedrine) have a stimulant effect and can keep you awake.

External things: Do you have a sleep partner who snores, moves around, or is otherwise disruptive? Do you have young children who are coming into your room or making noise and waking you up? How about a pet that is jumping on the bed or sleeping on the bed and preventing you from being comfortable or waking you up?

One final thing: **DON'T WATCH THE CLOCK!** If you are awake during the night don't keep checking the time. This makes you more anxious and makes it harder to fall back to sleep.